

NIH News in Health

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Inside News: 3 Raynaud's Disease 4 Warm Hands, Warm Feelings... New Alzheimer's Book... Herbs at a Glance

Healthy Holiday Gift Ideas Get Creative, Stay Healthy

We all know how hard it is to stay healthy over the holidays. This year, don't be part of the problem. Here are some gift ideas to help your family and friends be more, not less, healthy.

Typical food gifts encourage unhealthy eating during the holidays. Instead of giving a box of rich chocolate, try something more nutritious, like a box of fresh fruit. You can also bring gift boxes of almonds, walnuts and other unsalted nuts. Or how about a collection of gourmet teas?

You can find such healthy food gifts in stores or search for them online and have them sent directly. Many come in reusable metal boxes that can serve as a reminder of your thoughtfulness for years to come.

Another option is to prepare something yourself. You might put together a soup mix in a nice mason jar. Or you can simply get a gift card to a health food store or a quality grocery store to encourage them to pick out what they like themselves.

Other gifts beside food can promote nutritious eating. Reusable bento boxes, which have several small compartments for food, can encourage people to take healthier,

homemade lunches to work. Traditionally, these boxes have been used in Japan to pack small portions of rice, vegetables and fish or meat. As we've reported before in this newsletter,

the size and shape of containers can be as much as



double the amount of food you consume. So con-

tainers that hold only small portions of a variety of healthy foods can go a long way to encouraging healthier lunchtime eating at work.

You can also give a healthy foods cookbook. In addition to commercial cookbooks, NIH has several no- and low-cost cookbooks with nutritious recipes that have been reviewed by NIH experts.

NIH's National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) offers healthy cookbooks for \$4 each (downloads are free). *Keep the Beat: Heart Healthy Recipes* (item #03-2921) shows that you don't have to lose flavor to gain heart health. Want recipes for popular, easy-to-prepare, taste-tested Latino and African-American dishes created in a heart-healthy way? Order the bilingual English/Spanish *Delicious Heart Healthy Latino Recipes* (item #08-4049) and *Heart Healthy Home Cooking African American Style* (item #08-3792). Just go to <http://email.nihbihin.net> to order any of these, or call 301-592-8573.

Down Home Healthy Cooking: Recipes and Tips for Healthy Cooking, from NIH's National Cancer Institute, provides recipes that are low-fat, high-fiber versions of traditional favorite African-American recipes. Order it for free at <https://cissecure.nci.nih.gov/ncipubs/details.asp?pid=1385> or call 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237).

Physical activity, of course, is the other part of staying healthy. For kids, sports equipment can be a great gift. Even something small like a flying disc, boomerang, football or soccer ball can provide hours of healthy and fun family activity.

Exercise clothing—particularly

continued on page 2

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continued from page 1

outdoor clothes for cold weather exercise—can make a great holiday gift. So can accessories, like a pedometer, which is an inexpensive device you clip to your belt to measure how many steps you take per day. It gives you a general measure of physical activity (see http://dnrc.nih.gov/move/pedometer_use.shtml). A good goal is to get at least 10,000 steps per day.

A watch with a heart rate monitor can be a wonderful gift for active people. It can help them exercise at a level that safely improves their fitness. For runners, a watch with a GPS (global positioning system) can help them track not only how far they're running but also their average pace. Hikers might also appreciate a GPS device or other accessories, like a walking stick.

With a gift of a bicycle trainer, a cyclist can keep cycling no matter

how bad the weather. The hub of a bicycle's back wheel clamps into one of these devices, allowing cyclists to spin indoors. Cyclists can switch gears to vary resistance and at the same time read, watch TV or use a video to boost motivation. For the more serious cyclist, bicycle rollers provide a realistic, albeit pricier, indoor cycling experience.

Other pricier fit gift ideas include a bicycle, push scooter, ping-pong table or indoor exercise equipment like a treadmill. Some video game systems have special accessories that encourage physical activity as well.

If you're not sure what they'd like, consider giving a gift card for an outdoor or sports shop and let them pick something out themselves. For someone who's not sure where to start, a drop-in gift certificate for exercise or yoga classes at a local health club—or a visit with a fitness trainer—might encourage them to

**Web Links**

For links to more information about healthy gift ideas, see this story online: <http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2008/December/feature1.htm>

get into the exercise habit.

Books and videos on health and fitness are also a good gift idea. These can outline a fitness program or help improve performance in a sport. Or try a book of local walking tours, hiking paths or bicycling paths.

From NIH, you can order *The Healthy Heart Handbook for Women* from NHLBI (item 07-2720) for \$4 at <http://email.nhlbi.nih.net>. Also from NHLBI is the 2009 *Keep the Beat* wall calendar, which has creative healthy living tips and helps you track heart disease risks. Order your copies today at <http://email.nhlbi.nih.net/ktbcalendar>. You can also order from NHLBI by calling 301-592-8573.

Another idea is to give a subscription to a healthy living magazine. Whether cooking, fitness or general health, a monthly dose of good advice can help people stay on track all year round.

Chronic stress has been linked to high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular problems. So why not give something to help with relaxation? It could be soothing music, candles or soaps. Also consider a gift certificate for a massage or relaxation spa.

As we've reported in these pages, scientists are finding that the arts can benefit both your mental and physical health. So how about some nice art supplies as a gift? Or a musical instrument? A gift certificate for dance lessons can improve both mental and physical health.

You don't even have to spend any money to give a great gift, either. You can make up a coupon for a run, bike ride or a workout together—or even just to meet for a walk. Get creative and give a gift you know they'll love, and that will love them back. ■

**Wise Choices**
A No-Cost Gift for Your Family

Perhaps the greatest gift of all for your family would be to make a family health portrait.

Tracing the illnesses experienced by your parents, grandparents and other blood relatives can help family doctors predict the disorders your family members may be at risk for, and help you all take action to keep healthy.

NIH and the U.S. Surgeon General have created a free web-based tool to help you build a drawing of your family tree and a chart of your family health history that you can print and share with your family members and doctor. It takes some work to gather all this information, but your family will doubtless appreciate the gift.

Go to <http://familyhistory.hhs.gov/> now to start building your family health portrait.

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Cold Fingers and Toes?

It Might Be Raynaud's

When the temperature drops this winter, it's normal to feel it most in your fingers, toes, ears and nose. But if your fingers and toes regularly turn bluish or white when the temperature dips even slightly, or if they often feel numb or painful or turn red and tingle when you're stressed or cold, it may be a sign you have something called Raynaud's disease.

Raynaud's (pronounced Ray-NOSE) disease is a disorder that affects blood vessels. Estimates vary, but most studies suggest that it affects about 3-5% of the population, especially women. It can arise at any age, although it typically appears

during teenage years or later.

In people with Raynaud's disease, blood vessels have an extreme response to cold temperatures and stress. The body's normal response to prolonged cold temperatures is to tighten blood vessels and reduce blood flow to the fingers, toes and other extremities. This helps to slow heat loss and keep warm blood flowing to your brain and other vital organs. Likewise, stressful situations normally trigger the release of hormones that can also cause blood vessels to narrow in your extremities.

But in people with Raynaud's, the response to cold and stress is far more rapid and severe. Just taking something out of the freezer or sitting in an air-conditioned room can trigger an attack, which may last for less than a minute or as long as a few hours.

During a Raynaud's attack, the blood vessels quickly narrow and reduce the flow of blood, causing the skin to temporarily turn white, then bluish. When blood flow later returns, the skin turns red. Your fingers and toes may throb or feel numb and tingly. With severe Raynaud's, which is uncommon, prolonged or repeated episodes can cause skin sores or tissue death (gangrene).

Most cases of Raynaud's have no known cause—a condition called primary Raynaud's disease. Primary Raynaud's is typically more of a bother than a serious illness. It can often be managed with minor lifestyle changes, like wearing warm socks around the house or wearing gloves when removing things from the freezer.

When Raynaud's disease can be linked to an underlying medical condition, it's called secondary Raynaud's or Raynaud's phenomenon. Secondary Raynaud's is a more complex and typically more serious condition. It



is most often caused by connective tissue disease, like scleroderma or lupus. Some of these diseases reduce blood flow to the fingers and toes. Secondary Raynaud's can also be caused by some medications that reduce blood flow, including certain blood pressure and migraine headache drugs. Treating the underlying condition or changing medications, if possible, is often the best way to reduce Raynaud's symptoms.

Physicians usually recommend non-drug treatments for patients with primary Raynaud's, because they're not at risk for tissue damage. Secondary Raynaud's may require prescription medications that help to improve blood flow and heal skin sores on fingers and toes. Be sure to talk with your doctor if you think you may have Raynaud's disease. ■



Wise Choices Avoid Raynaud's Attacks

You can take some simple steps to prevent or reduce the severity of Raynaud's attacks:

- **Keep warm.** Wear a hat, gloves, scarf and coat when it's cold. Soak your hands in warm water at the first sign of an attack.
- **Don't smoke.** The nicotine in cigarettes causes the skin temperature to drop, which may lead to an attack.
- **Avoid certain medications** that cause blood vessels to narrow. These can include beta-blockers, some over-the-counter allergy or cold remedies and some migraine headache medications.
- **Control stress.** Steer clear of stressful situations. Relaxation techniques may help.
- **Exercise regularly.** Many doctors encourage patients who have Raynaud's disease to exercise regularly, but talk with your doctor before beginning an exercise program.



Web Links

For links to more information about Raynaud's disease, see this story online:
<http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2008/December/feature2.htm>

Health Capsules

For links to more information about these topics, visit this page online:
<http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2008/December/capsules.htm>

Warm Hands, Warm Feelings

Can holding a warm cup of coffee make you feel warm feelings toward someone else? Does a cold cup cause you to give somebody the cold shoulder? It seems unlikely. But new research suggests that heat sensations and psychological warmth are actually linked in our minds.

More than 41 college students participated in the study, which was conducted by NIH-funded scientists at Yale University. Each student was met in the lobby of a building by a woman carrying a cup of coffee. During the elevator ride up, she asked the participants to hold her cup for a second while she wrote something down. Half the participants were given a cup of hot coffee and half iced coffee.

Upstairs, they filled out a questionnaire about a fictitious person that was described to them. The described person was perceived to have significantly more "warm" personality traits by participants who had held the hot coffee cup. Those who'd held the iced coffee perceived the fictitious person to have a "colder" personality. The coffee temperature didn't affect the ratings on other traits unrelated to warm or cold ideas.

In another set of experiments, the scientists found that temperature could also affect behavior. Students primed with physical coldness were more likely to choose a gift for themselves, whereas those primed with physical warmth were more likely to choose the gift for a friend.

The scientists concluded that our experience of physical temperature affects our thoughts and behaviors toward other people, even though we're not aware of it. This finding has many practical implications, says lead researcher Dr. Lawrence E. Williams. "Being willing to reach out and touch another human being, to shake their hand, those experiences do matter, although we may not always be aware of them," he says. ■

New Alzheimer's Book Published

Once considered a rare disorder, Alzheimer's disease is now seen as a major public health problem, affecting up to 4.5 million people nationwide. The numbers of affected patients is expected to rise significantly as our population continues to age. That's why NIH's National Institute on Aging (NIA) has made the study of Alzheimer's disease one of its top priorities for the past 2 decades.

NIA has now issued a new 80-page book, called *Alzheimer's Disease: Unraveling the Mystery*, that's written especially for people with Alzheimer's

disease and their families, caregivers and others interested in the disorder. This colorful, illustrated publication helps readers understand the biology of Alzheimer's disease and how it affects the brain. The book also addresses issues that are important to caregivers and families, and it describes the latest scientific efforts to prevent, diagnose and reduce the effects of Alzheimer's disease.

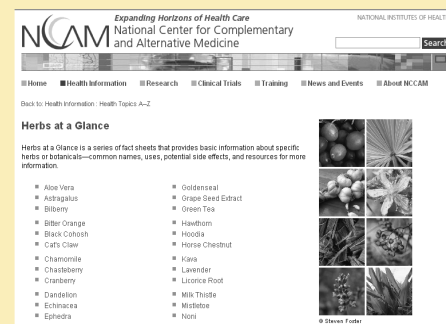
To preview, download or order copies, go to www.nia.nih.gov/Alzheimers/Publications/Unraveling, or call NIA's Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center at 1-800-438-4380. ■



Featured Web Site Herbs at a Glance

<http://nccam.nih.gov/herbs>

Herbal remedies—like green tea, echinacea and St. John's wort—have been used for centuries to prevent or treat a variety of medical ills. But do they work? This web site has a series of fact sheets about more than 40 herbs and botanicals. Read about their traditional uses, potential side effects and what current science says about their effectiveness.



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